



**Testimony of AARP, on H.B. 5372, AAC Accessible Housing
Housing Committee
March 4, 2010**

AARP is a nonprofit, non-partisan membership organization that serves people 50 and older. We have approximately 40 million members nationwide and over 600,000 in Connecticut. AARP supports voluntary incentive programs that encourage the development of "visitable" housing. Visitability features are a component of universal design; they address access to the main part of the house, such as wide doorways, a zero-step entrance, and access to a toilet facility. These features provide benefits to household members and enable others with mobility limitations to visit the resident. AARP supports H.B. 5372 and the goal of creating accessible housing through incentives.

Current trends in health care and community services emphasize aging in place. However, the structural barriers in much of existing housing can prevent older adults and people with disabilities from leading independent lives and fully participating in the community. Many houses have steps to all entrances, narrow doorways, long and narrow hallways and lack an accessible bathroom on the main floor. Although an overwhelming majority of Americans age 50+ (89%) want to stay in their homes for as long as they can,¹ these features make it difficult for them to do so. Architectural barriers also make it difficult for nondisabled individuals to accommodate visits from older friends and relatives, who need basic accessibility.

To address these concerns, H.B. 5372 would provide incentives to promote visitability. Visitability provides individuals the choice to age in place in their own homes. Visitability also allows individuals with physical limitations to visit the homes of family or friends, decreasing social isolation.

Advances in visitability can contribute greatly to the quality of life for all, at a relatively low cost. In fact, visitability standards can be achieved for as little as \$500. Moreover, encouraging visitable housing could actually save money in the long-run by ensuring that older individuals are not prematurely placed in nursing facilities.

¹ Providing More Long-term Support and Services at Home: Why It's Critical for Health Care Reform. AARP Public Policy Institute, June 2009.